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Central Intelligence Agency

Washington, D.C. 20505

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TO: The Editor,
The Washington Post

Usually when CIA analysis is reported inaccurately, we must suffer in silence. However, in the case of Stephen Rosenfeld's November 18 column "Knockdown of a Soviet Buildup," because we prepared an unclassified version of our work on trends in Soviet defense spending for the Joint Economic Committee of the Congress, I am able to put in proper perspective Mr. Rosenfeld's account of our analysis.

He suggests that our analysis of the Soviet defense effort portrays "a steady Soviet performance at a relatively low level" and that the Soviets used detente "to give themselves something of a breather."A balanced examination of our testimony conveys no such message.

We stated explicitly to the Committee that "our latest comparisons of US and Soviet defense programs show that despite somewhat slower growth in recent years the costs of Soviet defense activities still exceed those of the United States by a large margin. In 1981 the dollar costs of Soviet defense activities were 45 percent greater than US outlays; procurement costs alone were also 45 percent larger." Moreover, the Committee was reminded that the Soviet defense effort still is running between 13 and 14 percent of GNP -- that is, over twice the percentage of GNP devoted to defense spending in the United States.

We also stressed to the Committee that "trends in Soviet military spending are not a sufficient basis to form judgments about Soviet military capabilities, which are a complex function of weapons stocks, doctrine, training, generalship, and other factors important in a potential conflict. The cost estimates are best used to identify shifts in priorities and trends in resource commitments to military programs over an extended period of time. Moreover, the spending estimates do not give an

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appreciation of the large stocks of strategic and conventional weapon systems already deployed. Indeed, current levels of spending are so high that despite the procurement plateau noted, the Soviet forces have received since 1975 about 2,000 ICBMs and SLBMs, over 5,000 tactical combat and interceptor aircraft, 15,000 tanks and substantial numbers of major surface combatants, SSBNs, and attack submarines."

Finally, it is worth pointing out that Soviet efforts to develop advanced weapon systems continue in the eighties at least at the rapid pace of the previous two decades. Among these are fighter and airborne control aircraft, ballistic and cruise missiles, space systems and submarines. The new systems cover the full range of technologically advanced weaponry the Soviets will need to modernize all major forces.

In sum, Mr. Rosenfeld's description of our analysis does not provide a balanced account of our testimony to the JEC. Our costing of the Soviet defense effort is very complex and susceptible to misrepresentation and misuse. Those who over-simplify or cite out of context our work in this important area do not contribute to needed public understanding of these issues. They also do an injustice to the professional, independent analysts in all of the agencies of the Intelligence Community working to broaden our knowledge and understanding of the Soviet defense effort.

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